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1. Wisconsin Earns 78 Ribbons, Top Award at American Cheese Society

By Jeanne Carpenter

Wisconsin cheesemakers joined an international array of award-winning cheesemakers at the annual American Cheese Society Competition on August 6 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, capturing 78 ribbons, including a Runner-Up Best of Show prize.

Of a record-breaking number of 1,676 entries, Wisconsin cheesemakers landed nearly one quarter of all awards bestowed, more than any other state. America's Dairyland's 78 awards included 1 Runner-Up Best in Show, 22 firsts, 24 seconds and 31 third places. Cheesemakers from 258 companies in 33 U.S. states, five Canadian provinces and one Mexican state were represented.

Capturing the top prize this year was Rogue River Blue, made by Rogue Creamery in Central Point, Oregon. This is the second Best of Show win for Rogue River Blue.

It previously won in 2009 at the ACS Conference & Competition in Austin, Texas, and is handmade using autumnal equinox milk from Brown Swiss and Holstein cows' milk. The five pound wheels are made by hand and aged in specially-constructed caves. The cheese ripens from naturally occurring molds found in the Rogue River Valley. After maturation, the cheese is wrapped in Syrah grape leaves from Carpenter Hill Vineyard which have been macerated in Clear Creek pear brandy and tied to the wheel with raffia. The cheese is released annually starting in September.



Photo by Uriah Carpenter

Winning Runner-Up Best in Show was Wisconsin's very own Cave Aged Marisa, an aged sheep's milk cheese made by Master Cheesemaker Sid Cook at Carr Valley Cheese in LaValle. It was the second time Cave Aged Marisa had won at ACS, winning Second Runner-Up Best in Show in 2008. Other Runner-Up Best in Show winners included two Canadian companies. Finica Food Specialties Limited in Ontario, tied

for Runner-Up Best of Show with Lindsay Bandaged Cheddar. Fromagerie Du Presbytere, Quebec, took Second Runner-Up Best of Show with Louis D'or, the second major win for the firm, washed rind cheese, after it was named the Grand Champion Cheese at the 2011 Canadian Cheese Grand Prix in April.

Amongst Wisconsin winners, Carr Valley Cheese landed the most ribbons, with 13, including its Runner Up Best in Show. Hidden Springs Creamery captured the second most, with 7 awards, and Sartori Foods in Plymouth took home six ribbons. Holland's Family Cheese in Thorp scored five ribbons, including a full sweep of the Flavor Added-Dutch Style category. Both Klondike Cheese, Monroe, and BelGioioso Cheese, Green Bay, earned 4 awards apiece.

Wisconsin cheeses earning first place ribbons include:

- **Mascarpone**, Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese, Waterloo
- **Brick**, Klondike Cheese, Monroe
- **Tomato & Basil Feta**, Klondike Cheese, Monroe
- **Monterey Jack**, Burnett Dairy Co-op, Grantsburg
- **Cocoa Cardona**, Carr Valley Cheese, LaValle
- **Cave Aged Marisa**, Carr Valley Cheese, LaValle
- **Cave Aged Mellage**, Carr Valley Cheese, LaValle
- **Casa Bolo Mellage**, Carr Valley Cheese, LaValle
- **Marieke Gouda Cumin**, Holland's Family Cheese, Thorp
- **Marieke Gouda Smoked Cumin**, Holland's Family Cheese, Thorp
- **Little Boy Blue**, Hook's Cheese, Mineral Point
- **Gran Queso Reserve**, Emmi Roth USA, Monroe
- **Sartori Parmesan**, Sartori, Plymouth
- **Sartori Reserve Black Pepper BellaVitano**, Sartori, Plymouth
- **Fresh Mozzarella Thermoform**, BelGioioso Cheese, Green Bay
- **Burrata**, BelGioioso Cheese, Green Bay
- **Evalon**, LaClare Farms Specialties, Chilton
- **Evalon with Fenugreek**, LaClare Farms Specialties, Chilton
- **Driftless-Cranberry**, Hidden Springs Creamery, Westby
- **Farmstead Feta**, Hidden Springs Creamery, Westby
- **Pleasant Ridge Reserve**, Uplands Cheese, Dodgeville



Photo by Uriah Carpenter

The ACS also inducted an inaugural class of pioneer goat cheesemakers into the Academy of Cheese. Honored from Wisconsin was Anne Topham of Fantome Farm in Ridgeway, who has crafted and sold hand-made goat cheese at the Dane County Farmer's Market in Madison for more than 20 years.

The annual ACS Conference & Competition – a gathering of cheesemakers, merchandisers, retailers, distributors, academicians, food writers, and enthusiasts from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Europe – celebrates American artisan, farmstead, and specialty cheese. For a full list of winners, visit <http://www.cheesesociety.org/competition/2011-acj-judging-competition-winners/> The 29th Annual ACS Conference and 28th Annual ACS Judging & Competition will take place in Raleigh, North Carolina from August 1-3, 2012.

2. Column: Positioning WI Dairy for the “Heritage Foods” Consumer



This month, we hear from DBIC Team Member **Andrea Neu**. Andrea launched her own company, Image Maker, in 2001, providing marketing and communications consulting services dedicated to business and product brand positioning. She assists DBIC clients and others with brand development projects, specializing in packaging, labeling, and marketing materials development. Prior to owning her own company, she served 18 years as Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications and Vice President of Marketing Services for the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board. All total, she has more than 35 years of experience in Integrated Marketing Communications, focusing her expertise within the food industry. This month, Andrea talks about **“Positioning Wisconsin Dairy for the “Heritage Foods” Consumer.”**

The local foods and “Slow Foods” movements continue to grow as more consumers seek the benefits of local produce, artisan-created foods, traditional methods of food production, and satisfy their hunger to know the “story” about the foods they purchase and serve to their families and friends.

According to “Artisan Foods: Culinary Trend Mapping Report” from the U.S. Center for Culinary Development (CCD)-Packaged Facts, this forward movement is driven by the consumer desire to buy local, experiment with new flavors, connect to actual food producers and also become more “green”/eco-friendly. There is a strong link in those consumers’ minds between local, artisan, small batch foods and product quality and goodness.

Trend-spotting panels at recent Fancy Food Shows identified regional heritage products as “having traction in the marketplace, and not a flash in the pan.” What was once considered old-fashioned is now considered a “heritage food.” Kara Nielsen, trendologist for CCD, cites a recent study (Datamonitor Product Launch Analytica) which showed that introductions of packaged foods labeled “artisan” have quadrupled in the past five years. And the number of new products launched with a “handmade” label has doubled. She attributes the increase to consumers who “want to know where their food is coming from and feeling nostalgia for a time gone by.”

DBIC’s consumer focus group research on Label Terms & Trends Analysis from 2004-2010 shows that top rated label and marketing terms are:

- Ethical treatment of animals
- Handcrafted and hand-made
- Award winning
- Artisan

The CCD Trends Map shows artisan food trends emerging across all five stages of their map. Three of the five directly identify opportunities for Wisconsin dairy:

1. Reinvented American Original Cheese: indulgent, handcrafted and farmstead cheese are easily incorporated into diverse menus by chefs or enjoyed on their own by consumers.
2. Handmade Ice Cream: using old-fashioned methods and organic or local ingredients—the innovators who offer out-of-the-ordinary flavors.

3. Artisan Pizza: perfecting wood-fired crusts, incorporating high quality local and fresh ingredients (including more specialty/artisan cheeses).

Wisconsin Dairy Leverages the Market Trends

Local and handcrafted products that emerge from small businesses—(not those from the big food companies that take questionable advantage of the “artisan” word for market position)—most often start with a recipe and technique that was part of an artisan's own heritage, offering a way to pass on a tradition to the next generation. And that is certainly true of our multi-generational Wisconsin artisan cheesemakers and farmstead dairy producers—they are returning to cheesemaking and dairying skills and passion for products that have often been in their families and part of their heritage for decades.

During the past seven years, DBIC has been fortunate to work with many of these entrepreneurial Wisconsin dairy families and small to medium-sized cheese plants to assist with Brand Development and help our clients create unique messages and marketing tools that communicate their history, pride and expertise as they launch new cheeses, yogurt, butter and specialty milk products—moving their businesses to value-added dairying and away from commodity products and lowest-price-driven markets.

Creating and promoting their own brand for handcrafted and special recipe products, rather than just selling to distributors and buyers that sell under their brand names, is an important long-term strategy to build equity in the family's business, and a valuable asset to pass on to the next generation. There are many steps to build a successful brand, which starts with a viable business and marketing plan, but also includes a great deal of sweat equity and personal time and financial investment. So the following are some important questions that our clients answer as they begin to build their business and their brand:



Defining a brand image, and how it will be developed, should be an extension of your company's background, history, as well as a vision for the future.

- Why are you in this food business and what do you intend to accomplish with your company and its products?
- What are the characteristics—skills and capabilities—of your business that will enable you to accomplish that vision?
- How do those facts establish your credibility and provide a unique and positive image?
- How will you create a brand “story” to communicate those unique characteristics and build the image?
- What are the one or two unique points of difference that you can build upon... points of difference that your competition will not be able to replicate?
- What is it about the product line...cheese, ice cream, yogurt, etc....that is special and will be of great interest to your target customers?

The marketing image—brand “story”—should be a reflection of the company's core values, unique heritage and capabilities, and even the geographic location of the products creation.

For more information on Building a Brand go to DBIC's website <http://www.dbicusa.org>

3. Cheese Flavor and Texture Begins with Choosing the Right Bacterial Culture

By Francis Percival

To some extent you might think of cheesemaking as farming conducted at a microbial level. The character of a cheese is mostly derived from the nature of its microbial populations, so cheesemakers, like farmers, carefully nurture their desired crops of bacteria, yeasts, and molds. Bright orange washed-rind molds or striking blue veins easily get our attention, but most often it is actually the invisible population of lactic acid bacteria that shapes the flavor and texture of a cheese.

To understand how this happens, it's essential to know that the first stage of almost all cheesemaking is the acidification of the milk. Starter cultures are simply strains of lactic-acid-producing bacteria that are added to the milk to ensure a prompt and controlled acidification. During the make these bacteria digest the lactose in the milk, creating lactic acid as a by-product. This is a kind of fermentation; it is one of the key variables that the cheesemaker observes to monitor the progress of curd.



However, the bacteria of the starter culture also have a significant role to play in the maturation of the cheese. During aging, the starter bacteria trapped in the formed curd die off and their cell walls break open, releasing enzymes that break down the fats and proteins within the cheese, thereby creating the flavorful and aromatic compounds that give a cheese its character. The breakdown of proteins by these enzymes also helps give soft cheeses their smooth, pliant texture. Similarly, in Swiss-type cheeses, the starter cultures will include strains of propionic bacteria, which in the later stages of cheesemaking consume some of the lactic acid (produced by their fellow bacteria) and release carbon dioxide gas, which slowly forms the holes (“eyes”) characteristic of many cheeses.

While cheesemaking is possible with no starter culture—simply by letting the indigenous lactic acid bacteria sour the milk—in practice almost all cheesemakers prefer the security of a more consistent and reliable acidification. Starter cultures can take many forms. At one end of the scale, the cheesemaker might retain some of the whey from the previous day’s make and use that to start the acidification. (This is a legal requirement for some cheeses, like Comté and Parmigiano-Reggiano, and a common technique used for many lactic goat’s cheeses from France.)

Alternately, dairy technology companies like Danisco sell freeze-dried, powdered starters for direct vat inoculation (DVI, also known as direct vat set or DVS). These are known strains in specific and consistent proportions that can just be sprinkled into the vat of milk. The websites of these companies offer a bewildering variety of different starters, each with their own flavor and acidity profiles. However, their very consistency and simplicity of use is also their greatest weakness; they are now ubiquitous.

In search of greater diversity of flavor, some cheesemakers in England who make British regional cheeses have taken to using old-world-style commercially cultured liquid “pint” starters. These are more demanding to use—they have to be bulked up in sterile milk—but they offer complex, undefined mixes of strains. The delicate liquid starters are kept frozen in liquid nitrogen, then grown at the creameries under

precisely controlled conditions in reconstituted skim-milk powder. One English company, AJ & RG Barber Ltd., opened its laboratory in the 1990s to ensure the continued availability of the traditional pint starters when the big dairies began moving over to DVI. Chris Griggs of Barber Ltd. is proud of the link that these starters provide with the cheesemaking of previous generations: "The starters themselves must have been isolated from all over the West Country as cultures which happened to make good cheese. I would guess that the oldest are from the 1970s."

It's important to remember that all starter cultures were initially found in nature somewhere. Even the most industrially made sachet of freeze-dried DVI starter is simply something a laboratory has selectively grown from an original sample. Indeed, with starter cultures it is not so much what you use as how you use it. If the milk at a creamery is blandly sterile and receives a high dose of a single-strain starter, the resulting cheese will be monotone in flavor. However, the same starter culture used in a small dose to kick-start the acidification of good unpasteurized milk, rich in its own healthy microflora, will result in a cheese that expresses its own uniqueness, rather than the packet from whence its starters came.

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<http://www.culturecheesemag.com/cheese iq/summer 2011/starter cultures>

4. Upcoming Events

- **Aug. 20: Spooner Sheep Day. Spooner Agricultural Research Station, Wis.**
Dairy farm profitability and lamb rearing are the two themes for this year's event. Following speaker sessions, the sheep barn and milking facility will be open for a self-guided tour. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., with the formal program scheduled to end at 2:45 p.m. For more information or to register, contact Lorraine Toman at 715-635-3735, or email lltoman@wisc.edu. The complete program may be viewed at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/wisheepandgoat/>.
 - **Sept. 9: Wisconsin Specialty Cheese Institute Member Meeting. Monroe, Wis.**
Alpine Slicing & Conversion in Monroe will next host the WSCI with a facility tour of their high quality slicing, cutting and packaging services. The tour begins at 9:30 a.m., with membership meeting to start at 11:15 a.m. To register, contact Kathy Brown at kathy@planningoptionsinc.com
 - **Sept. 20: Wisconsin Local Food Expo. Madison, Wis.**
Join the Institutional Food Market Coalition, Something Special from Wisconsin™, food buyers, distributors, farmers, and local food businesses for a dynamic day of buyer-seller networking. Highlights include one-on-one networking time for buyers and sellers, local food exhibitors, and opening remarks by Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett. To register, visit: <http://www.ifmwi.org>.
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The **Dairy Business Innovation Center** offers technical assistance to dairy producers and processors in developing value-added dairy products, business planning and market development. For more information, visit www.dbicusa.org or contact Jeanne Carpenter at 608-358-7837, email: jeanne@wordartisanllc.com.

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